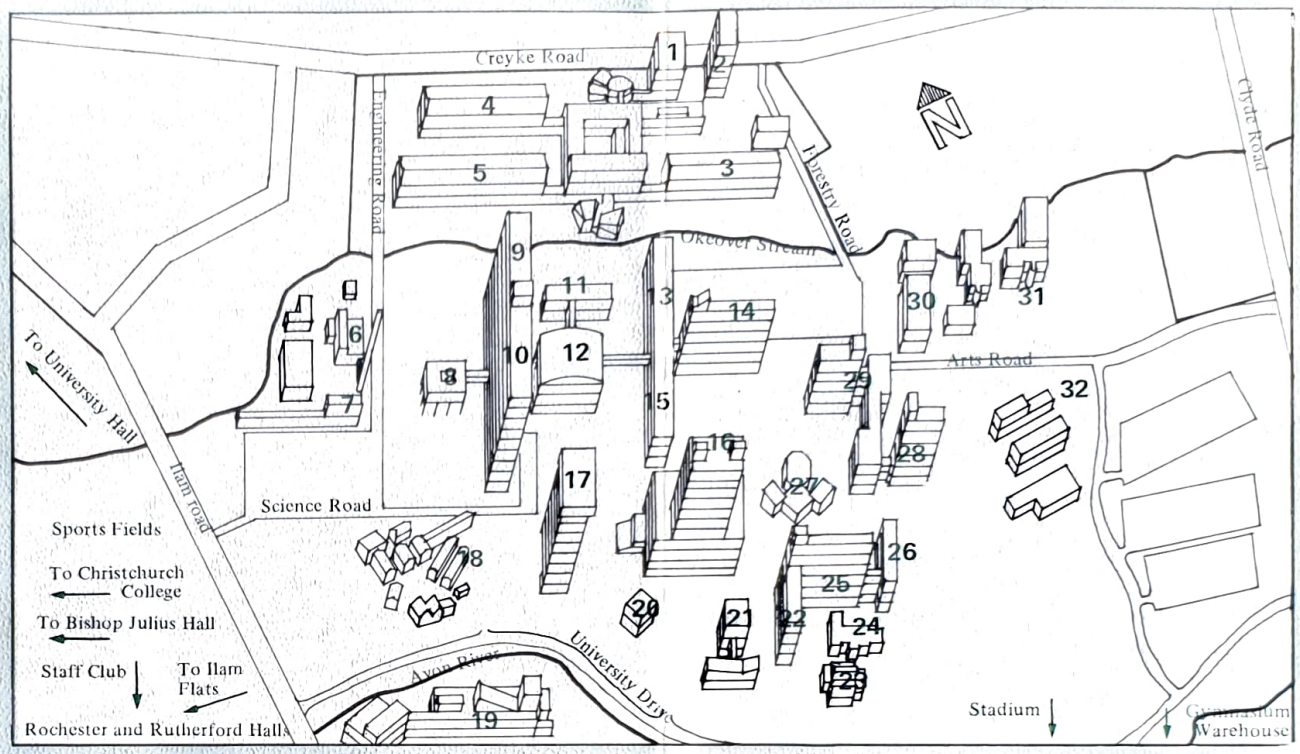
The University of Canterbury

The University of Canterbury, now established in its spacious new home at Ilam, was only the fourth university institution in Australia and New Zealand when it was founded in 1873. For much of its first century it was a small liberal arts college of the federal University of New Zealand and was housed in graceful stone buildings near the centre of Christchurch. But the rise in population after the Second World War, the realisation that scientific research in the universities was the source of technological and thus of social and economic change and the national policy of admitting all qualified persons willing to profit from higher education caused a rapid increase in enrolments in the 1960s. It thoroughly justified the University Council's imaginative decision in 1949 to build a new campus on the site of nearly 175 acres at Ilam, three miles west of the city centre.

The migration to the new campus began in 1957. When it was completed 18 years later, Canterbury had a student roll of more than 6500, nearly three times the 1949 roll. The students are taught in large, well-designed and well-equipped buildings with a total floor area of about 1.3 million square feet and costing more than $25 million.

Physical growth has been paralleled by advance in academic status. In 1961, when the University of New Zealand was abolished, Canterbury became one of four (now six) autonomous New Zealand universities. It has developed its own distinctive character and traditions and has won a sound reputation for the quality of its teaching and research. Each year it sends into the community more graduates than all those of its first 50 years and its research, into fields as diverse as chemical reactions in the upper atmosphere, estuarine pollution, electronic aids for the blind or the behaviour of reinforced concrete buildings in earthquakes, has won international attention.

The flat paddocks that were Ilam have been mounded, the courses of streams altered, some 6000 trees and shrubs have been planted and acres of rolling lawns sown to make Ilam a campus of which the city, province and New Zealand may be proud. But the buildings, in their park-like setting, are merely the outward sign of a profound inward transformation. The University, housed, equipped and staffed better than ever before, is able to serve the community which nourishes it better than ever before by, as the University of Canterbury Act 1961 has it, "the advancement of knowledge and the dissemination and maintenance thereof by teaching and research."



1 – Engineering Library
2 – Department of Chemical Engineering
3 – Department of Electrical Engineering
4 – Department of Mechanical Engineering
5 – Department of Civil Engineering
6 – Boiler house
7 – Maintenance Workshops
8 – Physical Sciences Library
9 – Department of Physics } Ernest Rutherford Building
10 – Department of Chemistry } Ernest Rutherford Building
11 – Department of Mathematics
12 – Faculty of Science Lecture Theatres
13 – Department of Geology
14 – Department of Zoology
15 – Department of Botany
16 – James Hight Library—Arts Building
Central Library
Departments of: Philosophy and Religious Studies, Law, Business Administration, Economics, Political Science, Accountancy, Classics

17 – Registry
18 – School of Fine Arts
19 – Students' Union
20 – University Bookshop
21 – Computer Centre and Department of Computer Science
22 – Departments of German, French and Asian Languages
23 – School of Music
24 – Arts Lecture Theatres
25 – Departments of English and Education
26 – Department of History
27 – Arts Lecture Theatres
28 – Department of Psychology and Sociology
29 – Department of Geography
30 – School of Forestry
31 – Forest Research Institute
32 – School of Fine Arts new buildings

Facts and Figures

Faculties: The University has seven faculties: Arts, Science, Engineering, Commerce, Law, Music and Fine Arts and Forestry, in order of enrolments. There are also interdisciplinary Boards of Studies for a post-graduate course in journalism and for the Certificate in Liberal Studies, a course designed specifically to attract mature students into the University. It has met with an almost overwhelming response from a very wide cross-section of the community. A Joint Centre for Environmental Sciences has been established in conjunction with Lincoln College, an agricultural college 12 miles from the city.

Finance: The original Canterbury College was financed partly from 300,000 acres of land endowed by the Canterbury Provincial Council, but today the University relies almost entirely on Government block grants negotiated quinquennially by the University Grants Committee, which acts as a buffer between the universities and the Government. The University's annual budget exceeds $12 million, about three-quarters of which goes on salary and wages. Other major items of expenditure include working equipment, the Library, cleaning and caretaking, maintenance, heating and lighting, telephones and postages, study leave, expenses of staff appointments, research and upkeep of grounds. Much of this money is spent in Christchurch. With student spending added, it is estimated that the University injects some $20 million a year into the city's economy.

Staff: The University has an academic staff of about 500, drawn from many parts of the world. They are supported by technicians, particularly in the science and engineering departments, administrative and secretarial assistants and by a wide range of tradesmen – from glassblowers to gardeners. In 1949 Canterbury had 20 teaching departments; today there are 31. The increase came from the division of subject areas and from the establishment of new courses, which provide an indication of the University's direction. The latter include Forestry, Business Administration, Asian Languages, Computer Science, Environmental Sciences and Journalism. Chairs in Industrial Administration and Industrial Technology were endowed.

Student Accommodation: About 40 per cent of Canterbury's students live outside Christchurch and nearly 900 of them are accommodated in halls of residence and University flats on the campus. Three halls were built as a result of a public appeal by the combined churches of Christchurch: Christchurch College (Anglican) for 125 men, Rochester Hall (Roman Catholic) for 104 men and women and Rutherford Hall (Presbyterian and Methodist), named for Canterbury's most distinguished graduate, Ernest Rutherford, which accommodates 63 men and women. The University built University Hall, a mixed hall for 316 students, with assistance from the Education vote and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was anxious to provide accommodation for some of the overseas students, who make up 9 per cent of Canterbury's roll. The Anglican Church also sponsored the construction of Bishop Julius Hall, which accommodates 77 women in a traditional hall and 33 in self-contained flats. The University built the Ilam Flats, which accommodate 144 students. The halls and flats became the athletes' village for the 1974 Commonwealth Games.

Students' Union: When the decision to move to Ilam was taken, far-sighted students agreed to pay a building levy to provide student facilities on the new campus. The result was the construction of a fine Students' Union containing a 450-seat theatre, cafeteria, ballroom, restaurant and numerous common rooms and activity rooms, which are controlled entirely by students. The Association has a half share in University Book Shop Ltd. It has built the first specially designed child day care centre in a New Zealand university and has established a large afforestation scheme, which is expected to yield a rich return in 20 years.

Field Stations: The University area is rich in resources for the field scientist and the University has a chain of field stations stretching from coast to coast of the South Island and as far south as Antarctica for teaching and research. The stations are at Kaikoura (marine zoology), Cass (biology and geography), Westport (geology), Harihari (forestry), Birdling's Flat (physics), the sub-Antarctic Snares Island (zoology) and Antarctica (biological research). In addition, the Universities of Canterbury, Pennsylvania and Florida jointly operate the Mount John University Observatory at Tekapo, near the Southern Alps.

Libraries: There are three libraries on the campus: The Engineering Library, fronting Creyke Road, the Physical Sciences Library, in front of the Ernest Rutherford Building, and the central library, in the James Hight Building, at the heart of the campus. They contain nearly half a million books. Space for expansion of the central library in the future is provided in the seven-storey tower above the library, which is at present occupied by academic departments.

Computer Centre: Canterbury was the first New Zealand university to install a computer – in 1961 – and it now has computing equipment worth 30 times that of the original system and 26 staff members in the Computer Centre, compared with the original two. In the centre there is a B6718 computer with a terminal to Lincoln College. Other interactive terminals are spread about the campus and computer graphics has not been neglected.

Extension Studies: The Department of Extension Studies is primarily responsible for extending the educational resources of the University into the community through a wide-ranging programme of non-credit weekly classes, seminars and field and laboratory exercises. These include refresher opportunities for a range of professional interests and a number of liberal studies classes with open entry.